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August 10 – 16, 2007
Part 1: News Analysis

Turkmenistan balanced the agendas of two global arch-rivals this week with back-to-back visits from the Iranian president, on the one hand, and from a U.S. Assistant Secretary of State and two American rights-based delegations, on the other. It was unclear whether President Berdymukhamedov's August 9 order to pardon and release eleven prisoners – including several high-profile political prisoners whose release had long been advocated by the west and some Islamic countries – was deliberately timed to fall on the eve of the arrival of the US delegations.

Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's trip to Ashgabat this week further cemented relations between two strategically important neighbors, but did not immediately resolve the main issue of importance to Turkmenistan: demarcation of the Caspian Sea bed to enable projects that would diversify Turkmenistan's options for foreign markets for its natural gas. That issue will likely be discussed at the forthcoming summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in which Central Asian nations will take part in Bishkek on August 16. Ahmadinejad made vigorous calls for cooperation and recognition of the two nations' shared Islamic culture, but was met with a somewhat muted response from Turkmen leader Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov. While nodding to the rhetoric of extension of cooperation, the two countries only signed previously-planned projects for shared construction of dams along their borders as well as joint programs for broadcasting and trade.

Also in Ashgabat this week competing for President Berdymukhamedov's attention was U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Daniel Sullivan, who also offered trade and assistance, and counseled diversification of energy markets to avoid dependence. He also hinted at problems with Iran by urging that trade should be conducted only with "responsible partners." Two U.S. delegations, the U.S. Congressional Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe and the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, visited Turkmenistan this week primarily interested in assessing progress in the area of human rights.

On August 9, President Berdymukhamedov pardoned ten men and one woman who had been imprisoned under his predecessor, Saparmurat Niyazov, on condition that they apologize for their alleged crimes. Among them was the former chief mufti of Turkmenistan, Nasrulla ibn Ibadulla, who upon release was offered a position as advisor to the State Council on Religious Affairs. Ibn Ibadulla, 60, who had been sentenced to 22 years of imprisonment on unconfirmed charges, appeared on television thanking the president. Others, including Esenaman Yklymov and Olga Prokofieva, were convicted in connection with the failed coup attempt of November 25, 2002.

The long-sought releases of prisoners, including a religious leader, was offset by failure to move on more recent cases of the jailing of Baptist believers and Jehovahs' Witness conscientious objectors, including one, Suleiman Udaev, sentenced this week.

At the same Cabinet meeting announcing the pardon of the prisoners, President Berdymukhamedov instigated yet another personnel shake-up, changing the Minister of Energy and Industry for the second time since he took office, and installing Gurbannur Annaveliev in the post. The ministers of automobile transport and roads as well as construction were also replaced.

Part 2: News Digest

The digest of primary news and information sources from which this News Analysis is in part derived is available in the News Digest -- Part 2 of the *Turkmenistan Weekly News Brief* -- which is attached. This week's Digest includes the following:

Summary: As Iranian President Ahmadinejad arrived in Ashgabat, and two U.S. delegations began talks there on human rights, President Berdymukhamedov pardoned 11 prisoners, some of whom were associated with the November 2002 coup plot against the previous Turkmen president. Among them was the former chief mufti of Turkmenistan, Nasrulla ibn Ibadulla, who was invited to serve as advisor to the State Religious Council.

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1. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

a. Iranian President Calls for Cooperation with Turkmenistan Against “Common Threats”

Original title: Ahmadinejad Calls for Greater Iran-Turkmen Cooperation.

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Full version: <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/08/d34931f7-0c6b-487d-834a-0eb51b1bc1e2.html>

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has called on Turkmenistan to cooperate in fighting terrorism and drug smuggling, RFE/RL's Turkmen Service reported. Ahmadinejad made his remarks on August 14 after arriving in Ashgabat from Kabul, where he met with Afghan President Hamid Karzai. Ahmadinejad said that drug trafficking is among the "common threats" that Iran and Turkmenistan face.

"Political and security cooperation between the two countries is very good and satisfying, and so is our international cooperation. What has been done until now is very [positive], but there is a lot more than we need to do together," Ahmadinejad said.

[Passage omitted: on scheduled meeting with Turkmen President and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit.]

b. Iran “Supports Turkmenistan In All Areas of Development”: Iranian President

Original title: Ahmadinejad Takes Diplomatic Offensive to Turkmenistan. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Source: The Middle East Times/08/15/07

Full version: <http://www.metimes.com/storyview.php?StoryID=20070815-052711-8457r>

Synopsis: After talks with Turkmen leader Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov on August 15, Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said that the neighboring countries shared Islamic culture, and declared that "Iran supports Turkmenistan in all areas of development," *The Middle East Times* reported, citing AFP. The Iranian leader said the two presidents had a "useful exchange" of views on political and economic cooperation. Berdimukhamedov said the two discussed "joint use of fossil fuel resources," though no details were given. The meeting preceded a summit of six nations, including Russian, China, and Central Asia, in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) to be held August 16.

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Daniel Sullivan made a "veiled warning" about cooperating with Iran in a speech August 14 that urged cooperation with "responsible neighbors," *The Middle East Times* noted. Sullivan asked that visa procedures be eased to establish an economic environment that can attract American companies.

c. Turkmenistan Likely to Join Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Experts

Original title: Turkmenistan Likely to Join Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Experts. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Source: RFE/RL/08/15/07

Full version: <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/08/4E008662-0AC5-43A8-8881-BAAB3853319D.html>

Synopsis: Turkmenistan is likely to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), a regional body uniting Russia, China, Iran, and the Central Asian nations that some have begun calling "an energy club" or even OPEC-like cartel, rferl.org reported on the eve of the SCO's August 16 summit in Bishkek.

Stephen Blank, a professor of national security studies at the U.S. Army War College's Strategic Studies Institute who has written extensively on the SCO told RFE/RL, "I think that they're going to try to expand the membership and write a new charter for the organization," Blank said. "I think that they're going to want to bring Turkmenistan into the operation if it wants to join. Second, I think they are going to write a new charter that will probably be even more anti-American than before."

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Denisov told the Russian daily *Vremya Novostei* in an interview August 15 that relations between current members still need to be strengthened. But he also said that "in principle" Turkmenistan could ask to join the SCO and that the SCO has "an objective interest in

Turkmenistan as a state in the region." The most likely route for Turkmenistan would be receiving observer status as Uzbekistan did in 2000 before becoming a full member the following year.

d. Turkmenistan and Iran Agree on Dam Projects, Joint Broadcasting, Commerce

Original title: *Iran, Turkmenistan Issue Joint Statement. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.*

Source: Press TV of Iran/08/15/07

Full version: <http://www.presstv.ir/detail.aspx?id=19538§ionid=351020101>

Synopsis: Following a summit in Ashgabat on August 15, Turkmen president Berdymukhamedov and Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad issued a statement and their governments signed four documents on expanding bilateral cooperation on commerce, broadcasting and the completion of the Dousti Dam, as well as construction of the Shirtappeh Diversion Dam on the Hariroud River on the two countries' border, Iran's Press TV reported.

e. U.S. Assistant Secretary Sullivan Stresses “Openness, Economic Integration” with Turkmenistan

Original Title: *U.S. Assistant Secretary Daniel Sullivan Stresses “Openness, Economic Integration, and Partnership” with Turkmenistan*

Source: U.S. Embassy—Ashgabat/08/14/07

Full version: <http://turkmenistan.usembassy.gov/transcript20070814.html>.

On Tuesday, August 14, Daniel Sullivan, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Economic, Energy and Business Affairs delivered a policy speech before government officials, foreign diplomats, academics and the news media at the Ak Altyn Hotel in Ashgabat. Assistant Secretary Sullivan spoke about the importance of issues such as transparency, rule-of-law, and transportation and communications links in advancing the development of Turkmenistan and other countries in the region. He also used examples of other countries that have successfully developed politically and economically through strong partnership with the United States and the international community.

Sullivan noted, “America is interested and willing to join with Turkmenistan in trade and investment ... and to help in your transition to a more outward looking and dynamic country.”

[Passage omitted on description of Assistant Secretary Sullivan’s State Department bureau.]

f. President Berdymukhamedov Receives U.S. Assistant Secretary Sullivan, Discusses ‘Diversification’ of Turkmen-U.S. Relations

Original Title: *Turkmen Leader, U.S. Official Discuss Energy Cooperation*

Source: BBC Monitoring Central Asia/08/14/07

Synopsis: President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov received Assistant Secretary of State Daniel Sullivan on August 14, BBC Monitoring Central Asia reported, citing Turkmen TV Altyn Asyr. The U.S. charges d'affaires in Turkmenistan, Richard Hoagland, was also present. President Berdimukhamedov thanked the American guests for taking in the inauguration ceremony of a new checkpoint on the Turkmen-Afghan border, built and equipped with assistance from the U.S. and the UN.

The Turkmen leader stressed Turkmenistan's intention to find different routes to deliver its rich energy sources to world markets. Assistant Secretary of State Sullivan supported the Turkmen president's position and emphasized the great importance of Turkmenistan's energy projects. The two sides discussed the need for diversifying the Turkmen-U.S. partnership, by bringing a wider use of experience and technologies from U.S. companies, aside from the energy sphere, such as textiles, aviation, and agriculture.

g. U.S. Congressional Commission Visits Turkmenistan

Original Title: *U.S. Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe Visits Turkmenistan*

Source: Turkmen Government website/08/12/07

Full version: <http://www.turkmenistan.gov.tm/?idr=1&id=070812b>

Synopsis: The US Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe traveled to Turkmenistan for 3 days August 14, the official Turkmen government website reported. Commission members are scheduled to have meetings in the Turkmen Parliament, and various ministries including the Ministry for Oil and Gas and Mineral Resources, Ministry of Economy and Finance, and Ministry of Justice. The American delegation will be received in the Foreign Ministry of Turkmenistan and will have an introductory trip to Mary.

2. DOMESTIC DEVELOPMENTS

a. President Berdymukhamedov Pardons Eleven Prisoners

Original title: The President of Turkmenistan Signed the Decree on the Pardoning of Certain Persons Sentenced to Imprisonment.

Translation prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project

Source: Turkmen Government website/turkmenistan.tm.gov/08/09/07

Full version: <http://www.turkmenistan.gov.tm/?idr=1&id=070809b>

Decree of the President of Turkmenistan on the Pardoning of Persons Sentenced to Imprisonment

Taking into account the numerous appeals submitted by citizens to the State Presidential Commission to Review Citizens' Appeals On Activities of the Law-Enforcement Agencies, and the sincere repentance of convicts for acts committed by them, and also with an aim to strengthen the unity and cohesion of Turkmen society and harmony and prosperity in every family, I order:

The following persons to be pardoned, and released from further prison terms:

Annamyradova, Amangeldi Dortkulyyevich, born 1955, sentenced November 28, 2003 by the Supreme Court of Turkmenistan

Annayev, Myalikguly Annayevich, born 1957, sentenced November 12, 2003 by the Supreme Court of Turkmenistan

Atayev, Serdar Kakayevich, born 1972, sentenced March 3, 2003 by the Ashgabat City Court

Baykhanov, Akmukhammed Bayramovich, born in 1957, sentenced on September 10, 2003 by the Supreme Court of Turkmenistan

Hayytov, Yusup, born 1933, sentenced January 23, 2003 by the Ashgabat City Court

Meredov, Serdar Dyrdyevich, born 1965, sentenced February 27, 2003 by the Supreme Court of Turkmenistan

Nasrulla ibn Ibadulla, born 1947, sentenced March 1, 2004 by the Supreme Court of Turkmenistan.

Prokofieva, Olga Vasilievna, born 1979, sentenced February 24, 2003 by the Ashgabat City Court

Saparov, Shamukhammed Agayevich, born 1962, sentenced March 3, 2003 by the Ashgabat City Court

Taganov, Baymukhammed Taganov, born 1973, sentenced March 3, 2003 by the Ashgabat City Court

Yklymov, Esenaman Orazmukhammedovich, born 1969, sentenced January 13, 2003 by the Supreme Court of Turkmenistan.

[signed by] the president of Turkmenistan, Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov.

b. Pardoning of Prisoners Part of "Justice Tradition": Turkmen State TV

Original title: Pardoned Former Turkmen Mufti Gets New State Position. Copyright (c) 2007. RFE/RL, Inc. Reprinted with the permission of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 1201 Connecticut Ave., N.W. Washington DC 20036.

Source: rferl.org/08/05/07

Full version: <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/08/ecc6df31-74bd-4b0c-a011-453c666c6535.html>

Synopsis: Official state television TV Altyn Assyr announced that President Berdymukhamedov's decree to pardon some prisoners on August 9 was "Acting in line with the traditions of mercifulness and humanity of the Turkmen people and the policy of goodwill and justice," BBC Monitoring Central Asia reported.

The list of persons pardoned included Nasrulla ibn Ibadulla, an ethnic Uzbek, Turkmenistan's long-standing chief mufti, convicted allegedly for his protest against *Ruhnama*, a book compiled by Saparmurat Niyazov, then Turkmen president, BBC Monitoring reported. The majority of the persons in the list were convicted in connection with an alleged coup d'etat of November 25, 2002 to overthrow Niyazov, BBC Monitoring reported.

c. Freed Former Turkmen Mufti To Advise State Religious Council

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Source: RFE/RL/08/14/07

Full version: <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/08/0b5fcff5-83b2-4712-aa73-1639f2800cce.html>

Excerpt: Turkmenistan's former chief mufti, Nasrulla ibn Ibadulla, has been appointed to a state position less than one week after he was pardoned and released from jail, RFE/RL's Turkmen Service reported. Turkmen television showed President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov meeting with ibn Ibadulla and offering him the post of adviser at the State Council for Religious Affairs under Turkmenistan's president. Ibn Ibadulla, who is 60 years old, was sentenced in 2004 to 22 years in prison for treason, allegedly for involvement in an assassination attempt against former President Saparmurat Niyazov.

His arrest is thought to have been linked to his opposition to Niyazov's policies. He angered Niyazov with his opposition to the death sentences handed to people tried secretly for purported involvement in the alleged assassination attempt. Ibn Ibadulla was pardoned alongside 10 other prisoners. Upon his release, ibn Ibadulla expressed thanks to the new president, and promised to serve "our people, our country, our homeland, and our president."

d. Freed Former Chief Mufti May Have Been Persecuted for Uzbek Ethnicity

Original title: Former Mufti Offered Job in Presidential Council on Religious Affairs in Turkmenistan. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Source: Turkmen Institute for Human Rights/08/14/07

Full version: <http://www.chrono-tm.org/?0251043273000000000000011000000>

Synopsis: Nasrulla ibn Ibadulla, former chief mufti of Turkmenistan, among the 11 pardoned by President Berdymukhamedov August 9, appeared on state television August 13 to thank his benefactor and wish him prosperity and a long life, the Turkmen Institute for Human Rights (TIHR) reported. The release from prison of ibn Ibadulla, considered one of the most authoritative figures in Turkmenistan, was greeted by widespread approval, TIHR reported. While supporters waited to meet the religious leader in his native city of Dashoguz, authorities in Ashgabat evidently decided to keep him in the capital. He was offered a position as advisor to the official Council on Religious Affairs under the president of Turkmenistan.

Ibn Ibadulla was said to have been persecuted because of his Uzbek ethnicity, as he had personal contacts with the former Uzbek ambassador to Turkmenistan, who was expelled from Turkmenistan for allegedly harboring Boris Shikhmuradov after the events of November 25, 2002. Some imams in Turkmenistan have theorized that he fell from favor by not praising former president Niyazov sufficiently and endorsing *Ruhnama*, but TIHR notes that it was only after ibn Ibadulla's removal that the quotations from the *Ruhnama* appeared on the walls of the main mosque along with the Koran. Other sources close to the former mufti say some Arab leaders had interceded on his behalf, but Niyazov was adamant about not releasing him. Ibn Ibadulla is a survivor of the most notorious prison in Turkmenistan in Ovadandepe.

e. Jailed Former Agriculture Minister Still Held Without Charges

Original title: Statement of Maya Meredova, Daughter of Payzgeldi Meredov, Detained by Turkmen Authorities.

Source: Maya Meredova/08/14/07, email to OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Payzgeldi Meredov and his two sons, Kurban Meredov and Batyr Meredov, were detained by the Turkmen authorities (Ministry of National Security or "Ministerstvo Natsionalnoy Bezopasnosti" (MNB) – former KGB) on July 29, 2007. Kurban and Batyr were released after being interrogated for four days while Payzgeldi Meredov has been held in detention since July 29th. No official charges have been pressed against Payzgeldi Meredov and his sons however he is still not released. Under the Turkmen law his right to be charged or released within 3 days of detention has been violated.

Although two sons have been released they are called for interrogations by the Ministry of National Security on a daily basis. Payzgeldi Meredov is kept in an isolation cell in the Ministry of National Security under horrendous conditions, with poor hygiene and unbearable heat given extremely high summer temperatures in Turkmenistan. Only his son Batyr Meredov was allowed to see him on August 10, 2007. He has been assigned a lawyer however nominally, the lawyer is unable to exercise his power and to defend the detainee. Hence Payzgeldi Meredov is deprived of an opportunity to receive a lawful treatment and to protect his rights.

Payzgeldi Meredov has serious health problems. He was receiving treatment for hepatitis B for the past year which required injections almost on a daily basis and a special diet. He also suffers from high blood pressure, which has already affected his hearing, and diabetes. Due to constant interrogations and mental pressure from MNB officials and dire conditions he is kept in, his health is rapidly deteriorating. He requires an immediate access to his doctor.

On August 7, 2007 the Turkmen authorities started confiscating his personal property without proper warrants issued. At this stage his personal car as well as Kurban Meredov's personal vehicle (both Toyotas) has been seized by MNB officers arbitrarily without presenting any court orders.

[Passages omitted on biographies of Payzgeldi Meredov and his son and contact information for the family.]

f. Conscientious Objector Sentenced in Turkmenistan

Original title: TURKMENISTAN: Bayram Ashirgeldiev (m), aged 20, Nuryagdy Gairov (m), aged 27, Aleksandr Zuev (m), aged 27, Suleiman Udaev (m), aged 24. Excerpted from Urgent Action email.

Source: Amnesty International/08/14/07

Excerpt: Suleiman Udaev was sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment on 7 August, Amnesty International reported in an Urgent Action August 14. Amnesty International regards him as a prisoner of conscience, jailed solely to punish him for refusing to serve in the army on religious grounds. The situation of the three other Jehovah's Witnesses is believed to be unchanged.

Suleiman Udaev is now known to have been jailed by a district court in the city of Mary for "evasion of call-up to military service" (Article 219, part 1 of the Criminal Code of Turkmenistan). Reportedly, he had no legal representation. During the hearing the judge reportedly made fun of Suleiman Udaev's religious beliefs that precluded him from serving in the army. The judge reportedly said: "The Bible is not a complete book and maybe God forgot to write that you need to join the army and defend your country. You should change your mind and serve in the army."

Following the hearing he was taken to a detention facility in the city of Mary. On 13 August his relatives were allowed to visit him for the first time since the trial. Suleiman Udaev has lodged an appeal against the sentence.

A supporter of Suleiman Udaev in Turkmenistan told Amnesty International on 14 August: "We want that the whole world knows about this and that he will be released soon."

[Passages omitted on case background and addresses of officials to send appeals.]

g. Baptist Family Threatened With Deportation

Original title: Turkmenistan: Jehovah's Witness Jailed, Baptist Family Threatened With Deportation

Source: Forum 18 News Service/08/15/07. Excerpt from Forum 18.

Full version: http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1008

Russian citizen Yevgeny Potolov was expelled from Turkmenistan in early July for his religious activity, Forum 18 News Service Reported. Potolov's wife and children have now been threatened with deportation, the Baptist Council of Churches stated 15 August. During an August 12th evening raid on home worship by its congregation in the western port city of Turkmenbashi, two local officials and the city imam declared the gathering illegal, demanded identification documents from all present and told Nadezhda Potolov that they would deport her as she holds a residency permit rather than Turkmen citizenship. A Visa Department official and two employees of the Foreign Citizen State Registration Service reportedly arrived soon afterwards, but - apparently unaware that the congregation is Baptist - they drew up a protocol referring to "an illegal mob of Jehovah's Witnesses".

Forum 18 has again been unable to reach any officials who were willing to discuss the case.

3. ECONOMIC NEWS

a. Turkmen Foreign Trade Turnover Exceeds US \$6 Billion in First Half of 2007

Original title: Turkmen Foreign Trade Turnover Exceeds US \$6 Billion in First Half of 2007

Source: turkmenistan.ru/08/11/07

Full version: http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=10747&type=event&sort=date_desc

Synopsis: Turkmenistan's foreign trade turnover in the first half of 2007 increased by 42 percent compared to the same period in 2006, turkmenistan.ru reported. The Chairman of the Central Bank of Turkmenistan, Geldimyrat Abilov, provided the figures at an August 9 Cabinet meeting. Turkmenistan trades with 55 countries, and increased exports by 47 percent, totaling over US\$4 million, he said. Imports from 77 countries rose by 32.5 percent and reached over US\$2 million, an increase by 65 percent compared to 2006.

According to the Central Bank, during this period over US\$4 million went to the hard currency accounts of ministries and departments. The major earner was the oil and gas sector.

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